

Draft letter to elected officials

Everyone knows that clean water is essential for our health, and is especially critical for our children. Cold, clean water is also essential to the health of our fish and shellfish.

But what's far less well-known is that ~~many~~ some farming practices commonly used in our state send ~~potentially~~ harmful ~~pollutants~~ ~~toxins~~ into our waterways, ~~polluting~~ ~~degrading~~ our water, threatening public health, destroying vital habitat and endangering our fish and shellfish.

Farming right to the edge of our streams allows pesticides, fertilizers, and land-applied manure to enter into our waterways, and is Washington's largest source of stream pollution. These practices are responsible for nearly a third of the polluted rivers and streams in our state.

Unfortunately, ~~in many cases state water quality permitting requirements do not apply to these types of "non-point" sources of water pollution. Washington's agriculture industry has been exempted from most state permitting requirements to control these types of water pollution.~~ Farmers are encouraged to use voluntary best practices, but ~~there has been limited use of these voluntary measures to date, many waters remain impaired by agricultural sources, and have not resulted in meeting federal or state pollution standards or recovering salmon populations~~ remain threatened.

It is time to recognize that voluntary approaches have not been sufficient. Too many of our streams are polluted by agricultural practices. When public opinion research shows that three-quarters of Washingtonians support stronger laws protecting the health of our water resources in Washington, and most Washingtonians believe that protecting our water resources is even more important than growing our economy, it is time to recognize that ~~the public is ready to prioritize strong water resource protection~~ ~~voluntary approaches alone are not working.~~

One effective solution is ~~mandatory~~ streamside buffers. Other industries that work with the land, such as timber harvesters and developers, are required to use streamside buffers to prevent stream pollution. Adequate buffers can help the agriculture industry do its part to protect our water resources, too. The science is overwhelming: 100 feet of natural vegetation between farmland and our waterways would keep most pesticides, fertilizers, cows and manure out of our streams, and it would promote healthy habitat for our fish.

This issue has received little attention from the Legislature to date, but should. Fully two-thirds of Washingtonians support 100-foot natural buffers between agriculture lands and streams.

It's time to clean up our streams, for healthy fish, healthy farms and healthy families. I hope you can commit to examining this issue further, including the extent of the problem and effectiveness of streamside buffers as a solution. Holding ~~all the agricultural industry~~ ~~ies~~ to the same responsibility ~~as other industries for non-point source pollution~~ will help keep our rivers fishable, swimmable and drinkable for years to come.

Sincerely,

KUOW underwriting advertisement copy

Support for KUOW comes from What's Upstream dot com, a coalition of Washington clean water advocates working to protect salmon rivers and streams by addressing agricultural pollution as the major cause of pollution in salmon bearing streams. Clean water in Puget Sound starts with clean water upstream. More at What's upstream dot com.

Commented [FJ1]: It appears that this statistic is based on a table titled "POSSIBLE Pollution Source of Impairment of Assessed Waters" from a 13 year old report from Ecology. Is there a more recent citation with more definitive statements about sources?

Commented [LC2]: Needs to be supported by credible technical references.

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Commented [LC4]: Needs to be supported by credible technical references.

Commented [LC5]: Provide citations.

Commented [FJ6]: I think "cows" out of the river may not mean much to the general public. I would suggest deleting "cows" and adding "excess nutrients and bacteria" instead.

Commented [LC7]: Needs to be supported by credible technical references.